

September 27, 1988

Dear Sterling,

I look forward very much to our meeting on October 6. I would like to discuss with you various ways of moving ahead, at last, on the project of an autobiographical book.

I have just received a small grant--\$11,500 from an anonymous donor, administered through the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Era at Harvard--for seed money on such a project. This was a renewal of a grant from the previous year which supported work on the risks of the nuclear arms race. Thus, the proposal I submitted for preliminary work on a "political memoir" focussed on its relevance to this earlier work. It is not intended for the eyes of a publisher; at least, with respect to the more general autobiographical work I have in mind.

However, I am sending you this "Report on Recent Research and Prospectus for a Political Memoir"--in hopes you will have a chance to glance it over before our talk--because the autobiographical fragments presented at the end of it are relevant to the larger project.

What I would like to discuss with you is a memoir of considerably broader scope, and, I would presume, appealing to a much larger audience. The bulk of it would deal with episodes not alluded to in my grant proposal (which focusses on my involvement in nuclear war planning and command and control of nuclear weapons). These would include: experiences in the Marines and Harvard that led me toward a career in national security; my participation in the Pentagon in the secret planning of escalation in Vietnam; my experiences in Vietnam, with Lansdale, Vann and in the field (some of them alluded to in Sheehan's book just appearing on John Paul Vann); my efforts still within the Establishment to get us out of Vietnam; White House consulting for Nixon and Kissinger; Nixon's plan--still secret!--to win the war in Vietnam, which I expected, correctly, only to prolong and expand it; the influences that made me decide to resist Nixon's policy by putting out the Pentagon Papers, with the expectation that I would go to prison for the rest of my life; the 21-month process of copying and bringing out the Pentagon Papers; two years in court, facing 115 years in prison; the concurrent covert operations of the White House "plumbers" to "neutralize" me, to keep me from exposing Nixon's threatened escalations, leading to the convictions of the highest members of the White House staff and to major counts in impeachment proceedings that forced Nixon from office; subsequent antiwar activities that helped end funding for the war; and a dozen years since of efforts by comparable means to end funding for the nuclear arms race. And a personal theme: an on-again, off-again romance with Patricia over six years, in Washington, Saigon and Malibu, that

really started with the first major rally against the war--I took a day off from the Pentagon, where I was planning it--then sent me, in some despair, to Vietnam, flourished and then broke off--over the war--in Vietnam, resumed after a three-year separation as I copied the Pentagon Papers, and culminated in our married partnership in putting them out, including thirteen days "underground" as objects of "the widest FBI manhunt since the Lindberg kidnapping."

I am also including papers by me which are referenced in the proposal. This makes for a bulky package, but don't think you have to go through all those. Several of these items I may have sent before, but I include them in case you hadn't seen them. For example, the Rolling Stone interview of last year ends with an anecdote from my Vietnam experience. Likewise, the affidavit alludes to some considerations that led me to put out the Pentagon Papers, and have kept me doing civil disobedience.

On that subject, by the way, I'm expecting to get arrested at my old office building, the Pentagon, this October 17, along with Dave Dellinger, William Sloane Coffin and some other old and new hands. It's a working reunion, not a sentimental one, to protest our war in El Salvador. They're still at it in the Pentagon, so we're still at it in their driveways.

Some things change, some things don't. It's the 21st anniversary of the March on the Pentagon, which Dave helped organize; I watched that one from the inside, standing at a window next to McNamara in his office, which was nextdoor to the room where we were writing the Pentagon Papers. It's also, approximately, the anniversary of the October 15 Moratorium, the nationwide rallies that deterred Nixon from carrying out the escalation he had secretly threatened in the fall of 1969, as Hersh disclosed in The Price of Power. That was the month I started copying the Pentagon Papers.

Whichever candidate gets elected (looks like Bush) he's likely to keep doing in El Salvador what has failed before, so we'll keep doing what worked before. All this takes some time away from writing, but it's part of the same effort. What's new in my life, this fall, is that I feel ready to commit myself at last to a major work of recollection and writing.

Yours sincerely,